

# Millennials at Work

## The Advice of Great Leaders

Carol Axten

**A**ccording to a recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecast, by 2015 about 70 million members of the millennial generation will enter the workforce and by 2030 will make up 75 percent of all working professionals. As managers in the acquisition profession, are you ready to lead members of this generation who have been labeled “pampered,” “nurtured” and kept busy with myriad activities since they were toddlers?

Born between 1980 and 2000, as the new millennium approached, millennials have a tendency to question the status quo and hold a different set of priorities than their parents. They put less priority on careers and, instead, seek flexibility and balance of work, family and personal time. This means they can be viewed as both high-performance and high-maintenance types. These characteristics can pose challenges to older leaders in the workforce. However, millennials’ energy, enthusiasm, creativity and innovation are needed to make the acquisition community successful in a declining budget environment, while balancing developing and maintaining complex weapon and defense systems.

Let’s look to the words and actions of great leaders of the past and present, from President George Washington to President Barack Obama, to provide guidance on leading millennials. These leadership skills are timeless and will benefit all leaders in any organization—military or civilian government employees or even those in the private sector.

---

**Axten** has more than 30 years of experience in Defense Department engineering, program management, and policy development. She has graduate degrees in business, engineering, international relations, and national security resource strategy, and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland.



Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>APR 2015</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2015 to 00-00-2015</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Millennials at Work: The Advice of Great Leaders</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Defense Acquisition University, Defense AT&amp;L, 9820 Belvoir Road, Fort Belvoir, VA, 22060</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>5</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

### Abraham Lincoln on Preach a Vision

During the Civil War, through his speeches, writings and conversations, Lincoln preached the vision of America that he was shaping. No matter what vision an organization selects for itself, to apply Lincoln's advice the processes and policies need to align with that vision. Millennials need a vision and a plan to achieve the vision. Millennials were raised with structured schedules, hovering parents and hands-on teachers. Therefore, it is understandable that comments about millennials include their need for structure, supervision and a clear plan for accomplishing tasks. They will look to the leader to provide a vision and execution plan just as their parents provided a vision with direction and close oversight.

Millennials also need to understand how their jobs fit into the vision of their organizations. They will not merely follow directions but want to understand how their actions support a given purpose. Leaders need to eliminate the processes or steps that add "no value" and are found redundant. Lean Six Sigma method, a collaborative team initiative for defining and eliminating waste in processes, is one tool leaders can use to streamline processes and improve worker satisfaction while reducing costs. Like Lincoln, leaders need to develop effective vision and execution plans for their organizations and rally workers around those visions and plans.

### President Obama's Values

In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, President Obama wrote, "Our individualism has always been bound by a set of communal values, the glue upon which every healthy society depends. ... We value community, the neighborliness that expresses itself through raising the barn or coaching the soccer team." Millennials are more attuned than some other generations to helping others and to community service, charitable activity, global politics and environmental issues. Many high

schools require that students perform community service or be involved in social science activities in order to graduate, thereby increasing student awareness of those areas. Leaders must recognize that a job must provide workers with a sense of worth and fulfillment. Leaders need to convey the values of the organization by their leadership actions and not just their words. Leading by example will inspire millennials to embrace organizational values and provide a sense of community within the organization.

Initiatives are needed to provide a sense of community. For example, implementing environmentally "green" choices within the workplace will allow millennials to connect with the organization and to share a sense of responsibility.

### Warren Buffet on Integrity

In the book, *"The Warren Buffet CEO: Secrets of the Berkshire Hathaway Managers,"* financier Buffet recounts a memorandum he sent to all the Berkshire managers, stating, "We can afford to lose money—even a lot of money. We cannot afford to lose reputation—even a shred of reputation. Let's be sure that everything we do in business can be reported on the front page of a national newspaper in an article written by an unfriendly but intelligent reporter. In many areas, including acquisitions, Berkshire's results have benefited from its reputation, and we don't want to do anything that in any way can tarnish it."

Generating a stock price of more than \$200,000 a share by the end of 2014, Berkshire Hathaway leadership has proven that integrity is not a tradeoff that works against maintaining a competitive advantage. Integrity needs to be a core value of the organization, clearly articulated from the top leadership and visibly practiced by all throughout the organization. A reputation lost is seldom recovered, and subordinates will quickly lose trust in leadership when ethics are compromised.



Millennials, more than previous generations, expect an environment of honesty, trust and integrity in the workplace and all organizational dealings.

### **Colin Powell on the Clash of Ideas**

In the book, *Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell*, the former secretary of state said to his new staff at the State Department: "You will find an open style, you will find me bouncing in, you will find me wanting to talk to field officers. I want to hear the rough edges of all arguments. I don't want to concur things to death and coordinate things to death so I get a round pebble instead of a stone that has edges on it. I want to hear from you, I want to get all the great ideas that exist throughout the Department."

Millennials want to be heard. They want to know the reason for everything. They don't merely take direction but want to know the reason for the request and the ultimate goal. They tend to be outspoken since they were raised to be confident and to share their feelings and ideas. Leaders need to recognize that millennials may not have much experience but do have a great many opinions and expect to be able to voice those opinions. Powell encouraged employees to tell him the bad as well as the good news. Leaders need to express the desire for openness and an acceptance of opposing opinions. Don't underestimate the workforce members' ability to acquire knowledge based on experience. Millennials can use their tech savvy to very effectively chase down information. Although they may have little experience, they can prove very knowledgeable as a result of Internet surfing and an expanded social network.

### **George Washington and Walking Around**

During the Revolutionary War, General George Washington was known to invite his officers to dine with him in order to maintain communication. Why? This practice made it possible for everyone to know each other better, to understand

what they had in common and to discuss their differences. In this way, they built mutual trust, respect and confidence. As the top leader, Washington could assess his people's abilities—their strengths, skills and weaknesses. Leaders need to know their employees.

Millennials are social creatures, due to coming of age when cellphones were available. They have experienced constant interaction with their parents and will expect that connection with their workplace leaders. And their leaders will need to get out of their offices and spend time "with the troops," just as Washington did with the Continental Army. This interaction will improve rapport with and appreciation of each team member.

### **J.W. Marriott on Communication**

In his book, *The Spirit to Serve the Marriott Way*, J.W. Marriott stated: "After more than forty years in business, I've concluded that listening is the single most important on-the-job skill that a good manager can cultivate. A leader who doesn't listen well risks missing critical information, losing (or never winning) the confidence of staff and peers, and forfeiting the opportunity to be a proactive, hands-on manager."

Leaders are expected to be good communicators but few realize the need to be good listeners. Leaders need to listen to their employees to gain a level of competence and experience that the leader acting alone may lack. In time, problems faced by organizations will become ever more challenging. The creativity of the millennials will bring a new perspective to resolving those problems.

### **Jack Welch on "Fail Your Way to Success"**

Former General Electric Corp. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jack Welch survived a few failures, even blowing up a pilot plant in an incident involving a bad chemical reaction.





Welch likens himself to inventor Thomas Alva Edison, who failed his way to success. Unless one takes calculated risks, innovation will never happen. The millennial generation is willing to test the limits and needs leaders who will allow them to take risks. This generation needs to be taught how to take calculated risks and how to learn from their mistakes. Leaders can accomplish this by choosing tasks that are challenging yet within the employee's skill level, rewarding innovation while tolerating failures and encouraging people to see the possibilities inherent in change. Leaders need to be learners—learning new information and new skills and learning from their mistakes.

### **Winston Churchill on Innovation**

Although known as a great leader, Britain's World War II prime minister also is considered a great innovator. He produced a constant stream of ideas for inventions. Although some were considered impractical, many were both useful and realistic. Millennials are tech savvy. They are tech gurus who can process information on the Internet with lightning speed. A 12-year-old can take a new, never-played video game out of the carton, pop it into the game box and operate it immediately. Previous generations would have read the manual page by page before pushing the first button. The younger generations acquire, retain and correlate information faster than the boomer generation can comprehend. The younger generations have developed electronic intuition and are screaming for opportunities to innovate. Leaders merely need to provide the environment for them to be creative.

### **Theodore Roosevelt on Fun at Work**

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography that, "the joy of life is a very good thing, and while work is essential in it, play also has its place. ... I have enjoyed myself in the

White House more than I have ever known any other President to enjoy himself." Roosevelt understood that the workplace should be fun, or one either is not doing it well or is not suited for the job. Leaders should find their jobs interesting and enjoyable, and they should convey this to their employees. Millennials want their jobs to be interesting—and fun. Most of all, they want an employer who puts these concerns first. Whereas baby boomers born after World War II and before the early 1960s and "generation X" employees born between 1960 and 1980 saw their goals in life as one of progressively improving in their jobs, millennials strive to learn the job quickly and then move on to learning something new. They will become bored by mundane jobs that previous generations accepted as part of life. Leaders need to strive to keep the job challenging and to provide opportunities to all for continuous learning.

### **Donald Rumsfeld on Bureaucracy and Pragmatic Leadership**

No one better understands how difficult change is in a bureaucratic organization than does former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. A 2006 article in the journal *Strategic Forum* (Number 221) of the Institute for National Strategic Security Studies at the National Defense University, "Reforming Pentagon Strategic Decisionmaking" (Christopher J. Lam, Irving Lachow), summarized a Sept. 10, 2001, Rumsfeld speech. Rumsfeld described the Pentagon bureaucracy as the enemy, arguing that it disrupts the defense of the United States and risks the lives of servicemen and -women. In the 2002 book by Jeffrey Kramer, *The Rumsfeld Way*, the former defense secretary is quoted as saying, "It's been a process of trying to not change things for the sake of changing things, but to get a sense of what's coming down the track on the freight train. And trying to figure out a way in which you can affect that without waiting two years."



# ACQUIPEDIA

## ACQUISITION ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COMMON TERMS

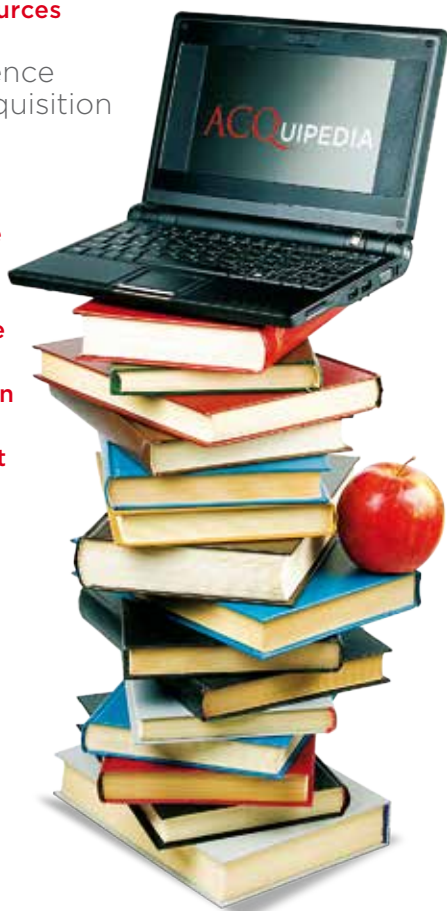
An online encyclopedia that provides the acquisition workforce with quick access to information on common acquisition topics and terms.

Online articles provide just what you need to know in a **succinct and digestible format:**

- Definitions and narratives
- Links to related policy, guidance, lessons learned, tools, communities, training, and other resources

Your reference tool for acquisition topics

- Quick
- Concise
- High-value content
- Searchable
- Available 24/7—when and where you need it



[HTTPS://DAP.DAU.MIL/ACQUIPEDIA](https://dap.dau.mil/acquipedia)

Millennials emphasize earning respect based on skills, abilities and accomplishments. They look for jobs that provide opportunities to share ideas, accelerate advancement, learn continuously and allow alternate work schedules. Millennials are not conformists. They have high expectations of what the organization and its leadership should provide. They are perceived as requiring high maintenance, more than any other in workforce history. They want feedback now. They want training now. They want recognition now. And they want to create the lifestyle they desire—now. If managers can learn how to harness their energy and coach them effectively, these young employees have the potential to be the highest-producing generation ever.

Bureaucracy, which tends to be the norm in government and the military, will prove to be a demotivator for this generation. It will kill their enthusiasm. For a generation that asks why about everything, an answer of “because that’s how we do it” will create frustration. Millennials believe life and work are about flexibility, individuality and creativity; therefore, they will expect considerable tailoring of policies and processes to achieve the greatest effectiveness. They will expect leadership and coworkers to think and not just follow the established procedures.

### Leading Millennials

These timeless perspectives on leadership will “bring out the best” from the millennial generation and benefit every generation. Millennials are fluent in technology, possess great business acumen and have a firm grasp of money matters. Multitasking is second nature to them. They have been raised to juggle extracurricular activities, active social calendars, school and homework, part-time jobs and volunteer programs—and to do it all successfully. They manage social media circles around the world through community websites. Their sociability feeds a desire to support working as a group in order increase productivity. They are optimistic, confident and goal oriented. Millennials are not the problem; they are the solution.

The millennial generation will be the generation of change. The millennials’ desire to break the stereotypical norms of the previous generations, and their energy to do so, will shake up business as well as government and the military. Their appreciation of flexibility, their tech savvy, their ability to learn quickly and their desire to serve and make the world a better place are qualities that should not be wasted by organizational rigidity. Organizations need to change to meet the challenges of the future, and millennials bring the skills and abilities to make the government and military successful. In Powell’s words, “Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.” Millennials thrive on leadership. The organizations that figure this out will be very successful in the future. &

The author can be contacted at [carol.axten@navy.mil](mailto:carol.axten@navy.mil).